Modi, Trump have 'incredible friendship', says new envoy

NEW DELHI: US ambassador-designate Sergio Gor said on Monday his mission in India is to strengthen ties between the "oldest and the largest democracies" and conveyed President Donald Trump's best wishes to "his friend" Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He said that India and the US are discussing a trade deal and the first call between the negotiators will be made on Tuesday.

The trade discussion is a euphemism for Mr Trump as the envoy told the US Senate at his confirmation hearing that the president was "crystal clear" about stopping all oil imports from Russia to India, *The Hindu* said.

Mr Gor also said that India will be invited to join as a full member of Pax Silica, a new US-led strategic initiative aimed at securing global silicon and high-technology supply chains.

The ambassador's statement, made to hundreds of US embassy staffers in Delhi and Indian media, was unconventional as Mr Gor has not yet presented his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu.

According to diplomatic protocol, ambassadors are expected to make public appearances only after the credentials are presented. Sources said President Murmu will accept the credentials later this week.

Mr Gor said that the "friendship" between Mr Trump and Mr Modi is "real" and the US and India "are bound not just by shared interests, but by a relationship anchored at the highest levels. Real friends can disagree, but always resolve their differences in the end".

"And while trade is very important for our relationship, we will continue to work closely together on other very important areas, such as security, counter-terrorism, energy, technology, education, and health," Mr Gor added.

Earlier, he told the US Senate that Mr Trump had made it "crystal clear" that India would have to end all imports of Russian oil, which make up about 35 to 40 per cent of India's intake.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick also said that trade negotiations would be resolved "once" India stops buying the oil, suggesting this was a pre-condition for any deal. Sergio Gor, who hopes to be confirmed soon, added that India and the US are "not that far apart" from a deal on the 50pc tariffs that the US has imposed on India.

"I do think it will get resolved in the next few weeks," Mr Gor said, also indicating that Mr Trump was committed to travelling to India for the Quad Summit, and has invited Indian commerce and trade officials to Washington next week to resume talks on a free trade agreement.

Mr Lutnick, who has been more sharply critical of India, said that the US president had called India's purchase of Russian oil as "nonsense".

"India has to basically open its market, and stop buying Russian oil," Mr Lutnick told reporters in one of a series of interviews he gave on Friday.

The comments by US officials came days after Mr Trump posted that he expected "no difficulty" in coming to an agreement on trade.

In the past few days, the *Financial Times* and *CNBC TV* have reported that Mr Trump told European Union leaders in a call that they must impose "100pc tariffs" on India and China for their purchases of Russian oil, *The Hindu* said. —Correspondent

A BICYCLE taxi and a car drive along a street in Havana as life remains normal despite tensions with US.—AFP

Trump vows to cut off oil unless Cuba 'makes deal'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump urged Cuba on Sunday to "make a deal" soon, pledging to cut off all oil and money flowing to the communist-run island after the toppling of Havana's key ally, Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro.

The threatening social media post drew an angry retort from Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who said "no one" would tell his country what to do.

Washington has imposed economy-crippling sanctions on its island neighbor for decades, but Trump has ramped up the pressure in recent days.

US special forces seized Maduro and his wife this month in a lightning raid that left dozens of the ousted Venezuelan president's security personnel dead -- many of whom were Cuban.

Though Maduro's allies have become interim leaders, Trump has claimed the United States now actually controls Venezuela, through a US naval blockade of its vital oil sector.

"THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA - ZERO!" Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

"I strongly suggest they make a deal, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE." He said "Cuba lived, for many years, on large amounts of OIL and MONEY from Venezuela. In return, Cuba provided 'Security Services' for the last two Venezuelan dictators, BUT NOT ANYMORE!"

"Most of those Cubans are DEAD from last week's US attack, and Venezuela doesn't need protection anymore from the thugs and extortionists who held them hostage for so many years."

Asked about it later on Sunday, Trump told reporters travelling with him on Air Force One that he wanted people forced out of Cuba or who "left under duress" to be taken care of.

"Most importantly, right now, we're going to take care of the people that came from Cuba, that are American citizens, or in our country," Trump said, without clarifying how this would be achieved under a deal with Havana.

Ready to fall

A week ago, Trump stated that "Cuba is ready to fall," noting that the island's economic crisis was worsening and it would be difficult for Havana to "hold out" without receiving heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil.

Earlier on Sunday, the president reposted a message that jokingly suggested US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a child of Cuban immigrants who concurrently holds the posts of national security adviser, acting head of the US archives, and acting international aid administrator, could also become the president of Cuba.

Trump shared that post with the comment: "Sounds good to me!"

Cuba's president rebuffed Trump's threatening language, saying the Caribbean island's residents were "ready to defend the homeland to the last drop of blood." "Cuba is a free, independent and sovereign nation. No one tells us what to do," Diaz-Canel wrote on X.

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez also weighed in to stress that Cuba is within its rights to import fuel from any willing exporter, "without interference or subordination to the unilateral coercive measures of the United States."

'Talk, talk, talk'

A Cold War-era US trade embargo has cinched Cuba's economy beginning in 1962, and since 2000 Havana increasingly has relied on Venezuelan oil provided as part of a deal struck with Maduro's predecessor, the firebrand leftist Hugo Chavez.

On Sunday in the streets of Havana, retiree Mercedes Simon seemed to dismiss the US leader's latest bluster.

"Trump is not going to touch Cuba," the 65-year-old said. "All the president s talk, talk, talk" about Cuba, for decades, "but they don't act." Marcos Sanchez, a 21-year-old working in the restaurant business, said the two countries should find common ground, "without resorting to violence."— AFP

Police issue arrest warrant against former Netanyahu aide

JERUSALEM: Israeli police issued an arrest warrant for a former aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday, accusing him of being implicated in two affairs involving the premier's office.

Israel Einhorn, a former campaign adviser to Netanyahu who now lives in Serbia, appeared on a list of people whom the police suspect of involvement in the so-called "Bild affair" and are prevented from communicating with the prime minister's office.

Next to Einhorn's name a line was added saying there is a "pending arrest warrant against him," according to a document submitted to the court.

"We can confirm the warrant," a police spokesman told said.

The Bild affair involved the leaking of classified intelligence from the Israeli military to the German tabloid *Bild* in September 2024. Two other Netanyahu aides were arrested and indicted for the leak.

The document alleged that Hamas was not interested in a ceasefire agreement, and to support Netanyahu's claim that the prisoners taken by Hamas on October 7, 2023, could only be released through military pressure rather than negotiations.

Einhorn has not returned to Israel since the investigation was opened, but he was questioned by Israeli investigators in Serbia last year.

He is also a suspect in the so-called "Qatargate" scandal, in which he and other close associates of Netanyahu are accused of being recruited by Qatar to promote the Gulf country's image in Israel.

Qatar hosts senior Hamas leaders and has played a mediating role between Israel and the Palestinian movement during the conflict in Gaza.

It also sent millions of dollars in cash to Gaza every month between 2018 and October 2023 to pay Hamas's civil servants and for cash handouts to Palestinian families.

The news of the warrant came after the police detained a current senior aide to Netanyahu suspected of obstructing an investigation, with local media reporting that it was the premier's chief of staff Tzachi Braverman.— AFP

Govt walks back 'unapproved' ordinance after PPP protestations

Continued from Page 1

Qamar told *Dawn* that the president, after receiving the bill, had consulted the party members who advised him to ask the government to reconsider the ordinance as some clauses were considered an encroachment on the provinces' rights.

It may be noted that in Jan last year, PPP Senator Saleem Mandviwalla claimed that directives issued by the Presidency were not being heeded by the Prime Minister's Office.

PPP boycotts session

Earlier, Mr Qamar said for the first time in Pakistan's legislative history, an ordinance had been promulgated without the approval or the signature of the president, which was against the Constitution. "I do not know what is the government's excuse for doing this?" he asked while speaking on a point of order.

As the PPP MNAs walked out of the house, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar attempted to placate them, requesting them to come back and join the proceedings. The law minister explained that an ordinance was issued on advice and "there is no doubt" that the president had given his assent. Mr Tarar insisted that Article 89 of the Constitution was subject to Article 48(1) of the Constitution, under which the advice of the prime minister was binding on the president.

He informed the house that "nine or 10 bills and ordinances" were pending presidential assent, and the ministry came to know only on Sunday that President Zardari had given his assent to those bills. He conceded that the ordinance in question may or may not be among the ones accorded assent by the president.

"We don't say that we are going to pass an ordinance which has not been assented to by the president. […] There is something circulating on social media," he said, adding that he would take up the issue with his ministry and would then inform the house.

Mr Tarar said the deeming clause was invoked under Article 75 of the Constitution when the bills returned by the president and passed by the parliament in a joint sitting were not assented to within 10 days. "But we never notified them out of respect for the president," he remarked.

Opposition leader's appointment

At the outset of the session, the speaker formally initiated the process for the appointment of the NA opposition leader and asked the opposition to re-submit the proposal for the nomination of the leader of the opposition.

The post has been vacant since August last year following the disqualification of PTI's Omar Ayub by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). While the opposition has accused the government of delaying the appointment, Mr Sadiq maintained that the delay was because the matter was sub judice.

On Monday, Mr Sadiq said that as PTI's Ayub had withdrawn his petitions in the Supreme Court and high courts against his removal, the nomination process could now be formally initiated.

"This issue had to head towards resolution only then. We would have done so if we had not been made a party [to the case]," he said. Addressing the opposition benches, he said proposals for nominating the opposition leader may be submitted in his chambers by 3pm today (Tuesday) as per Rule 39(ii) of the Rules of Procedure. He said the nomination should be accompanied by the signatures of members of the opposition.

It is worth noting that the opposition had submitted the name of Mahmood Khan Achakzai — who heads the opposition alliance Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan — to the speaker's office in October 2025 rather than presenting it to the speaker personally.

Students, pilgrims make trek back to Pakistan

Continued from Page 1

crossing point, while more were expected to return on Tuesday (today).

A group of Pakistani students reached the border in coaches and crossed into Pakistan from Iran on Sunday evening while pilgrims reached on Monday afternoon.

The officials of the FIA immigration confirmed the return of students and pilgrims from Iran. "Over 100 students and pilgrims have returned to Pakistan from Iran in the last two days," Balaach Yaqoob, senior FIA official told *Dawn* over the phone. He said another group of 50 students was expected to reach the Gabad-250 border on Tuesday morning.

"Around 40 Pakistani pilgrims including women and children reached Gabad on Monday afternoon," the official in charge of the Gabad border post said. He added, "We have also received an 18-member family of Pakistani pilgrims at the immigration office."

According to them, he said, more pilgrims were on their way to Gabad. He said most of the students and pilgrims, who arrived at the border crossing, later left for their hometowns.

About the 50 other students who were expected to arrive on Tuesday, the official said, "We are waiting for them. They are students of Zanjan University of Medical sciences."

Channels open even as US, Iran trade barbs

Continued from Page 1

claimed that several hundred people had been killed in the protests so far, Iranian outlets reported an altogether different version of events.

"Iran wants to negotiate, yes. We might meet with them. A meeting is being set up, but we may have to act because of what is happening before the meeting, but a meeting is being set up. Iran called, they want to negotiate," he told reporters on Air Force One a day earlier.

"The communication channel between our Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and the US special envoy (Steve Witkoff) is open and messages are exchanged whenever necessary," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said.

Although US President Donald Trump had signalled over the weekend that Washington may meet with Iranian officials, the White House has stepped up pressure on Tehran, saying that it was not afraid to use military force over violence against demonstrators, but prefers to go the diplomatic route.

Baghaei said "contradictory messages" from the US showed a lack of seriousness, but that contacts continued. White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt also leveled a similar accusation, saying that that Iran was sending "quite different" messages privately than what it is saying publicly.

The Iranian leadership has coupled its openness to talks with warnings against military intervention.

Meanwhile, in a statement on Monday regarding the recent unrest in the country, Iran's Embassy in Islamabad characterised the events as legitimate economic protests that were exploited by foreign-backed violence.

Conflicting accounts

US-based rights group HRANA said it had verified the deaths of 572 people -- 503 protesters and 69 security personnel, with 10,694 people arrested since the protests began on Dec 28 and spread around the country.

The Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights (IHR) said it had confirmed 648 people killed during the protests, including nine minors, and thousands more injuries, but warned the death toll was likely much higher -- "according to some estimates more than 6,000", it claimed.

However, according to broadcasts on Iranian state media, thousands of people filled the capital's Inqilaab Square, brandishing national flag as prayers were offered for victims of what the government has termed "riots".

Addressing the state-organised rally, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf warned Trump against a "miscalculation," threatening that American bases and ships in the region would be destroyed if Washington attacked.

"Let us be clear: in the case of an attack on Iran, the occupied territories as well as all US bases and ships will be our legitimate target," Qalibaf said, referring to Israel.

Verified video footage from a forensic centre in Tehran also showed rows of body bags, though Reuters was unable to independently verify casualty tallies.

Iran's judiciary chief, Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei, on Monday doubled down on threats of "swift and harsh" punishment for detainees. Officials warned that "rioters" could face charges of moharebeh — waging war against God — a crime punishable by death.

Araghchi stated that 53 mosques and 180 ambulances had been burned during the unrest, blaming the violence on "terrorists" backed by the US and Israel.

'Fact sheet'

According to the Iranian embassy in Islamabad, "sector-based protest gatherings" began on Dec 28, 2025. These demonstrations were initially organised by traders in the Tehran Bazaar, driven by economic grievances following a sharp increase in foreign exchange rates.

While reaffirming Tehran's commitment to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly under its constitution, the embassy drew a sharp distinction between "lawful demands" and violent insurrection.

"Distinction should be made between peaceful protest and riots or violent acts," the embassy wrote. "The rights of millions of peace-seeking Iranians will not be compromised due to the actions of a very limited number of violent individuals."

The statement emphasised that international human rights bodies should not expect law enforcement to remain "indifferent to armed or violent acts" that occur alongside peaceful assemblies.

Officials alleged that lawful gatherings were manipulated due to foreign interference, escalating into armed clashes in some instances.

The release detailed specific allegations of violence, including attacks on police stations, the use of firearms, and the deployment of "incendiary devices such as Molotov cocktails" against officers.

Despite these challenges, the embassy insisted that police have exercised "restraint" and "utmost care" to restore order while minimising harm.

The statement levelled heavy accusations against the United States and Israel. The embassy rejected the Israeli Prime Minister's recent expressions of sympathy for the Iranian people as "profoundly deceptive," alleging that the "Zionist regime" actively seeks to sow division within Iranian society.

The release stated that aggressive actions by Israel have resulted in the deaths of more than 1,100 Iranian citizens over several decades.

Furthermore, Tehran strongly condemned the US president and other American officials for "reckless statements" regarding Iran's internal affairs.

The embassy concluded by identifying "unilateral coercive measures" as the primary driver of the country's economic instability.

The statement argued that these extensive sanctions have restricted Iran's financial resources, disrupted trade and investment, and blocked access to essential goods, thereby having a "direct and adverse impact" on the livelihoods of ordinary citizens.

The ambassadors of Britain, Italy, Germany and France in Tehran were summoned to the foreign ministry, semi-official Tasnim news agency reported on Monday, and asked to relay to their governments Tehran's request to withdraw their support for the protests.

Meanwhile, addressing the potential for US involvement, China on Monday also expressed its opposition to a foreign intervention.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning called on all parties to contribute to regional stability, stating that Beijing opposes "interference in other countries' internal affairs."

"We call on all parties to do more things conducive to peace and stability in the Middle East," she added.—Agencies

One Battle After Another, *Hamnet* triumph at Golden Globes

SARA Murphy, Teyana Taylor, Paul Thomas Anderson and Chase Infiniti, who won the 'Best Motion Picture — Musical or Comedy Award' for *One Battle After Another,* pose during the 83rd annual Golden Globe Awards.—AFP

BEVERLY HILLS: *One Battle After Another* reigned supreme at the Golden Globes on Sunday, winning best comedy, while *Hamnet* sprung a surprise by taking best drama film at the splashy Hollywood ceremony.

Paul Thomas Anderson's screwball thriller *One Battle*, which centres on an aging revolutionary played by Leonardo DiCaprio, led the night by winning four of its nine nominations.

It also collected awards for best director, best screenplay and best supporting actress for Teyana Taylor at the lavish Globes gala, which is a key stepping stone on the road to the Oscars in March.

"You guys are being so generous with this affection for me and this film -- and I'll take it," beamed Anderson.

His film – a rollicking ride featuring violent leftist radicals, immigration raids and white supremacists – has connected with audiences and critics at a time when the United States is deeply polarised.

But in the closely watched lead actor category, DiCaprio was passed over in favor of Timothee Chalamet's performance as an ambitious 1950s table tennis player in *Marty Supreme*.

"I'm in a category with many greats — this category is stacked. I look up to all of you," said Chalamet, who also bested George Clooney (*Jay Kelly*) and Ethan Hawke (*Blue Moon*).

Sinners, which surprised moviegoers with its eclectic mix of vampires, politics, race relations and blues music, had to settle for best score, and the Globes' recent — and vaguely defined — "best cinematic and box office achievement" award.

Sentimental Value, a Norwegian family dramedy, took best supporting actor for Stellan Skarsgard.

Rose Byrne won for best comedy actress for *If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*.

Netflix's musical mega-hit *KPop Demon Hunters* won best song and best animated film.

The Globes also honoured the best in television. Searing teen murder saga *Adolescence* topped the section with four wins, while *The Pitt* won best drama and *The Studio* took the best comedy prize.—AFP